

June 1, 2016

US House of Representatives

Committee on Natural Resources Oversight Field Hearing

“Elevating Local Voices and Promoting Transparency for a Potential Monument Designation in Maine”

Testimony of Bob Meyers, Executive Director
Maine Snowmobile Association [REDACTED]

Chairman Bishop and Distinguished Committee Members:

My name is Bob Meyers and I am presenting information on behalf of the 26,000 individuals and 2,100 businesses that belong to the Maine Snowmobile Association. Our 289 snowmobile clubs groom and maintain 14,000 miles of trails in Maine, 95% of which are on private land.

Our Association first went on the record in opposition to federal ownership in the North Woods in 1998. That opposition has been reiterated in two subsequent votes of our directors in the past 18 years. The reason is simple. Federal ownership and their distant management conflicts with Maine’s tradition of virtually unfettered access for public recreation on private land. Provided they behave themselves, folks are able to enjoy not only snowmobiling, but other traditional activities like hunting, trapping, fishing and camping on locally managed private lands. These activities combine to produce over a billion dollars a year in economic activity. Conflicts on usage may arise on occasion, but they are worked out with ongoing dialogue between land owners and recreational land users. More importantly, this recreation takes place as a secondary activity within actively managed working forests. The forest products industry has an economic value of over \$7 billion annually.

What Roxanne Quimby, Lucas St. Clair and Elliotsville Plantation are proposing is not a “gift,” as they call it, but rather an outlier in the larger context of land conservation in Maine. Mainers take their land conservation seriously. Maine has 3.8 million acres conserved in fee and easement, including 2.1 million acres in our working forests. It’s no accident that Mount Katahdin is featured prominently in promotional materials for this proposed national monument or park. Baxter State Park and Katahdin represent everything that the land proposed for a monument designation is not. Ironically one of Governor Baxter’s motivations for creating the remarkable gift of this state park for the people of Maine was his desire to protect the lands from becoming a federal park.

For the past several years, park proponents have been traveling the state telling everyone just about anything they wanted to hear. No problem was too big to be overcome. Concerned about recreation access? No problem – we’ll make a national recreation area too. No access to our ownership? No problem – we’ll share the use of timber management roads. Want local input? Sure we’ll have a local advisory group that will oversee the management of the park. But of course all of it remains a problem.

Elliotsville Plantation has identified the recreation area, but they only own 20% of the proposed land (see attached map). Most of the 64 landowners who own the other 80% are rightly concerned that the

park service will be painting bullseyes on their backs. Vacationers will be mighty surprised when they come around a curve and encounter 250,000 pounds of wood coming towards them. And the advisory group? Just about every national park has one, but their job is to advocate, not advise. When the Park Service completed their illegal acquisition of Maine land in Schoodic last fall, the local acquisition review committee learned about it after the fact from the local paper.

One of the more telling points in the presentations by park proponents is the economic study they have completed. The rosy picture that is painted is far from reality and plays on the concerns of local communities that have been devastated by the closure of the local paper mills. Estimates of 400 to 1,000 jobs are thrown around, yet neglect to mention that those estimates are based on a full buildout of the park fifteen years down the road, if it is ever authorized by Congress and funded.

The same exaggeration is used with the promise of a \$20 million endowment, for the park with a pledge to help raise an additional \$20 million. They claim that the proceeds from the endowment will help fund construction and ongoing maintenance at their park. In reality, with almost \$12 billion in deferred maintenance shortfalls for the nation's National Parks, that endowment will do little if anything to help build that park.

It is likely that the more important role of the endowment was revealed at the recent public meetings about the park proposal by National Park Service Director Jon Jarvis. When asked a question about the Board of the National Park Foundation, and if Quimby had bought her way in, Jarvis' response was telling: "We like wealthy people because they give us their money. And they know other wealthy people who also give us their money. And philanthropy has always been part of the national park system. We have always had this relationship with wealthy people." That remark at the very least implies that pay-for-play is alive and well at the Park Service. The members of my Association find it appalling that a federal government agency would operate on that level.

From the perspective of our organization, we have watched the ongoing battles over access between the Park Service and their allies and snowmobilers over the past twenty years. Millions of dollars have been wasted in impact studies and lawsuits, usually filed by environmental groups with ties to the service. In each case, we have watched snowmobile access be slowly eroded, and have no doubt that path will be followed in Maine if the Park Service assumes control over more land.

The local residents have said no to the park proposal, and emphatically. Votes in three communities close to the proposed monument rejected the proposal for a park by votes of more than two to one. Not a single member of Maine's congressional delegation will introduce legislation to create a park in spite of hundreds of thousands of dollars spent on lobbyists and public relations consultants. In reality, the monument designation is not a step in the path to a federal park, it is an admission of failure in their quest to create this boondoggle. Maine people understand that this is not about conservation, it is about control and buying a legacy. If Roxanne Quimby and Lucas St. Clair truly believe in conservation, we urge them to abandon this monument proposal and work with the State of Maine to create a lasting conservation legacy.